

7.4 HUMAN SEXUALITY

1. PROLOGUE—THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGING ATTITUDES

Nowhere has there been a greater change in society's attitudes during the present century than in the openness of debate concerning sexual behaviour. Following on Freud's explicit discussion of sex as a major instinctive driving-force and the wider acceptance of Darwinism, with the adoption of so-called rational or scientific explanations of events which had previously been accepted as literal truths, Christians as well as non-Christians have been forced to re-think their previous assumptions. Certain Biblical precepts are largely ignored or discounted; not only parts of Jewish Law, but also many New Testament instructions are no longer held to be absolute. Today it is the exception rather than the rule in most Churches to see women wearing hats, while women in our pulpits, preaching the Gospel, are generally welcomed despite some interpretations of Pauline pronouncements. These are matters which may be hotly argued but, for the most part, the argument will be an intellectual one; they do not as a rule evoke the emotionally toned reaction which almost inevitably accompanies discussion of sexual behaviour or sexual ethics. We need to seek guidance not only on what Scripture actually says but also on its import for us in the closing years of this century.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 In pursuance of this objective, and arising out of the debate (in 1992) on the report on Family Matters, the General Assembly of 1992 instructed the Board of Social Responsibility to "look again at the area of human sexuality and report to a future General Assembly". The Board took steps to establish a study group and it met for the first time in August 1992. The membership of the study group is detailed in Appendix 1. The Board also decided that the report should be presented to the Assembly of 1994.

2.2.1 A report of the Church and Nation Committee in 1958 dealt with sexuality in the context of commenting on the proposals of the Wolfenden Report on Homosexuality Offences and Prostitution, in which they expressed the view that such changes were inappropriate. The Social and Moral Welfare Board brought reports to the Assemblies of 1967 and 1968, dealing with the Church and Homosexuals.

2.2.2 In 1967, three deliverances were brought forward:—

- (i) that homosexual acts between consenting adults in private should no longer be an offence under the criminal law;
- (ii) that a more sympathetic understanding of the difficulties and handicaps of those suffering from homosexual tendencies is required throughout the community and regret the comparative lack of psychiatric and medical treatment available;
- (iii) that ministers show special pastoral concern and care to those suffering from such tendencies, so that they may know that the Gospel of Redemption through Jesus Christ is for all.

In the event, (ii) and (iii) were replaced by the Assembly with a counter motion which:—
"deplored the prevalence of homosexual practices as a source of uncleanness and deterioration in human character and of weakness and decadence in the Nation's life."

2.2.3 The following year, 1968, the same three part deliverance put forward but altered in 1967 was accepted by the Assembly. In 1968, reference was made in the report to homosexuality as a sickness needing help, "although no complete cure had as yet been found". One of the possible causes of homosexuality was given in that report as genetic inheritance; and it was spoken of as a condition from which people suffered through no fault of their own.

2.2.4 Some fifteen years later, in 1983, the Board—now the Board of Social Responsibility—returned to the issue of homosexuality. It recommended no change in the Church's attitude to homosexual practices, concluding that Biblical attitudes condemned

homosexual acts and homosexuality in general; and Biblical teaching on marriage ruled out homosexuality as a possible Christian position. Nevertheless, the Report allows that a moral attitude would be irrelevant "if homosexuality could be shown to be determined in the same way as red hair"; and some Christian homosexuals will see "an active homosexual partnership" as in "no way contrary" to obedience to Christ.

2.2.5 All the Reports stressed the need for compassion and pastoral care and placed emphasis on grace, forgiveness and redemption in the Church's approach to people with a homosexual orientation.

2.2.6 In all these previous reports, the focus has been on homosexuality in isolation. In the present report, the emphasis will be on Sexuality, its development in people, the part it plays in their lives and in Biblical teaching and the way it is regarded by the Church. Arising from that study, the report will go on to consider implications for people in a range of situations, including homosexuality. A final section will summarize the report's conclusions.

2.3 The Study Group, in the time available, sought to cast its net as wide as possible for information and views. The reports prepared in recent years within other Churches on the same theme were consulted by the Group. Books on the subject from various perspectives were read by members and their contents summarized for the whole group. Articles and addresses from theological, medical and psychological sources were also taken into account. These are all listed as Appendix 3 to the Report. The group was also helped by several people who came to meetings to present and discuss experiences, information and viewpoints. Many others offered the same help which time prevented the group from accepting and this opportunity is taken of expressing thanks. The Board is satisfied that those consulted were representative of a variety of points of view. Finally, invitations were given through Life & Work, and by means of a letter in the Ministers' Mailing, to all members and ministers of the Church to write in and express views, information, experience, for the benefit of the Study Group. Assurance of confidentiality was given and a reasonable number of replies were received. Some quotations from these letters are given anonymously in Appendix 4 as illustrations of points made. On the basis of this work, the Board brings the following study to the General Assembly.

3. ONE VIEW OF THE GROWTH OF HUMAN SEXUALITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONHOOD

3.1.1 We begin by considering the growth of human sexuality and the development of personhood from the point of view of some human scientists. The human infant begins life in a state of complete dependence, both before birth in the womb and after birth when every physical and emotional need is met by the mother or mother substitute. Gradually the infant begins to differentiate the 'self' from the object supplying his/her needs and becomes aware that this 'object' can appear, disappear and re-appear; the infant's total security is threatened unless and until the dependability of the mother becomes evident. Emotional bonding and the germ of emergent sexuality are directly influenced by the security established at this early stage of development; relationships with other members of the family-group, with neighbours and within the wider social group all stem from this early one-to-one relationship with the mother.

3.1.2 The emotional traumas of weaning and of toilet-training form part of this early experience of self-awareness and the growing sense of identity (of 'personhood') is shaped by the response of those in the immediate environment in these early years. Pride in one's self and in one's body will be influenced, for good or ill, by the (often unconscious) signals received from the parent about what is 'good' and what is 'naughty'—the latter especially relating to toilet-training, exploratory masturbation, comparison of parts of the body with those of a child of the same or the opposite gender, and so on. There is considerable evidence that harsh, repressive reception of the child's early curiosity with regard to anal functioning may adversely affect personality-development, as also will parental disapproval of curiosity about sex-organs and gender-differences. To please the mother (whose disapproval is, after all, life-threatening), the child represses desires that have evoked this reaction; the strength of these desires

and of the repressive force needed to keep these impulses suppressed will express themselves later in abhorrence of any situation which threatens to evoke these same impulses. We react most strongly, in an irrational manner, against those ideas or practices which entice or fascinate us.

3.1.3.1 The emerging personality of the child is extremely vulnerable in these early years. The physical and/or emotional absence of either parent may affect the child's psycho-social and emotional growth unless there are compensating circumstances such as, for example, the involvement of other sympathetic adults to take the place of the absent mother or father figures. In particular, where the mother permits or conspires in a strong clinging relationship with her child, in which no significant masculine influence is allowed and encouraged, a male child is predisposed to develop homo-erotic tendencies. If a loved parent dies or leaves the home permanently, a child of either sex may be predisposed to lifelong feelings of guilt, depression, lack of self-worth and thereby to masochistic tendencies. The child who has missed the security and warmth of a stable home and has been deprived of affection, may all too readily 'sell' his/her body for monetary gain or in a vain attempt to be valued, thus denying his/her worth as a person. (S)He is open to abuse, both from strangers and within a framework of closer relationships. Having received no love as a child, it is difficult for the deprived adolescent or adult to respond to love. Frigidity may be one response; frenzied seeking for new relationships with repeated failures and disappointments may be another. Teenage pregnancy may originally stem from a desperate desire to give and receive the love that has been denied.

3.1.3.2 One psycho-analytic approach argues that the homosexual person, male or female, has been deprived of the same-sex parent at a very young age and is still in need of obtaining that affection (or an appropriate substitute). This need for affection and the consequent homosexual *feelings* which are an expression of the need to make good this deficit, are not in themselves sinful: it is the *eroticisation* of the same-sex attraction which is wrong, because it is inappropriate to the parent-child relationship which was broken or never established. This approach argues that the fulfilment of the unmet need should be undertaken through the understanding support of a mature counsellor of the same sex, not from another homosexual who has the same unmet needs to fulfil. As the need for 'parental' same-sex affection is met through understanding and friendship, it is suggested that psychological maturity, and with it the ability to form heterosexual relationships, can be achieved.

3.1.4.1 The development of an identifiable 'self' is a gradual process from infancy onwards. Following the establishing of a sense of security as an infant and the successful completion of the traumatic stages of weaning and toilet-training, the toddler begins to seek independence at the Nursery school (2-3 year old) stage. Later, at adolescence, the need to break free from the restrictions of the parents reasserts itself. This is a necessary and inevitable part of the growth towards maturity. The young person has to find ego-identity as a whole person and must be able to include, without shame, his/her body image as an essential part of the whole. An upbringing which denies that physical functioning is a natural part of the whole person is crippling to the emergent personality; but equally damaging is an environment in which there are no controls, no guidelines of acceptable behaviour and no awareness of responsibility towards others. Unrestrained freedom of activity, including sexual/genital activity, is as immature as an over-restrictive fear of participation. Maturity implies the recognition that each 'other' is also a person of worth, that each is a unique individual made in the image of God and loved by Him.

3.1.4.2 Physical maturity does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with psychological maturity. Recent research seems to suggest that early sexual/genital participation carries, for the female partner, an increased risk of disease, in particular of cervical cancer and of sexually transmitted diseases, because physiological changes in the female genital area are not yet complete and also the presence of antibodies protecting against infection has not reached normal adult levels. Early sexual intercourse, therefore, carries increased risks for any young female participant, especially if her partner is already sexually experienced.

3.1.5 Development of an integrated and coherent body-image can be particularly difficult for the disadvantaged members of our society. For some who have temporary or permanent physical disabilities, the negative attitudes of carers may make this especially hard, while for an unfortunate few, the loss of body-image is almost total and achieving an image of an

integrated self may be impossible without skilled help. Physical or mental impairment and the process of ageing should not preclude any person from becoming and remaining uniquely and wholly his/her God-given self.

3.1.6 In adolescence, the growth of intimacy and of experimental relationships (not specifically of a genital nature) with members of the same and the opposite gender are part of a normal pattern of development. The adolescent is at a crucial stage of seeking to establish ego-identity in a world which has always been confusing, but never more so than today when society is sending heightened signals to young people who are only too aware of their own emotional turmoil. Because of the greater potency of media-images, today's adolescents have even greater difficulty in establishing their own essential identity. Peer-group pressures are powerful. The adolescent who must break free from the restrictions of family to become a mature, independent adult is especially vulnerable to the influence of the peer-group and of the media catering for this age-group. These media-images are now percolating downwards into the age-group which previously we would have expected to be trouble-free, the 'latency period' when the immediate traumas of the pre-school years have been worked through and consolidated before the turmoil of adolescence begins.

3.1.7 The adolescent who is confused by the (quite normal) intimate feelings for a member of the same gender has, in the past, frequently wondered and worried about the possibility of his/her homosexuality. Today, because of increased public awareness, (s)he may too readily feel confirmed as a homosexual person, not realising that this is part of a normal exploration of relationships with others. There is general agreement among professional workers that homosexual feelings or activity in early adolescence do not necessarily imply adult homo-erotic status: the vast majority of adolescents move on towards heterosexual attachments and to the formation of a monogamous partnership in which they find fulfilment. As mature adults, then, they enter into a permanent relationship and are ready to undertake the responsibility of the conception and nurture of children.

3.1.8 Nonetheless, Jung perceives that within each of us there is an underlying component of our personality which is complementary to our conscious selves: thus the 'anima' (in Jung's terminology) is the unconscious feminine component of the male psyche, the 'animus' the masculine component within the female psyche. In an ideal marriage, the unconscious male within the woman would be complementary to her partner's unconscious feminine element; in such a union, two would indeed become one. To be whole people, we must be able to give expression to all facets of our personhood: to deny the feminine is a false attempt to be 'manly'. To accept the 'female within' as a complement to the masculine self, and vice versa, gives recognition to the integrated self. In this mature person, body, mind and spirit are in harmony within the self, in relation to others and in relation to God.

3.1.9 Sexuality is not an additional adjunct, an 'optional extra'. It is an integral part of being human. It may or may not be expressed in genital relationships, but it is a basic constituent of our *whole* being, of our personhood. Jesus came to live on earth as fully human as well as fully divine; He was a whole person, not only spiritual but with mind and body also, and that necessarily includes sexuality. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, but too often we have focussed our attention on the wickedness of 'things of the flesh' instead of offering praise and thanks to God for His gift of sexuality. We can express our sexuality in many different ways: in celibacy, in genital relationships; in a creative way in music, painting, architecture and other artistic activities; in caring work with, for example, ill, ageing or disadvantaged people; in family life. What we cannot do, if we are to remain whole, is to deny it. To repress our sexuality is to go through life crippled. Our judgement will be warped, often by our unconscious fears and desires. We must acknowledge that we are sexual beings so that we can live fully ourselves in body, mind and spirit, as God intended for us.

4. DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

4.1.1 The first creation narrative affirms the essential goodness of human sexuality by locating it in God's act of creating humankind 'in his image' (Genesis 1:27). This gives sexuality a spiritual dimension that finds its most profound expression in Paul's reference to

sexual union in marriage as a symbol of the mystical union between Christ and the Church, His Bride (Ephesians 5:32).

4.1.2 By contrast, Genesis 2 portrays the creation of woman as a consequence of man's 'incompleteness', which suggests that sexuality can be seen as the embodiment of our constitutional need for human relationships of depth and intimacy. This view of sexuality is reflected in the 'down to earth' way subsequent Biblical writers treat the subject, without the embarrassment and prudery of some later generations.

4.1.3 The picture in Genesis 2:25 of man and woman, 'naked and unashamed' is important in providing a Biblical basis for seeing sexuality as a divine gift to be enjoyed. The heterosexual context of these two chapters also lays the foundation for the equality and mutuality that lie at the heart of Christian marriage (1 Corinthians 7:3f and Ephesians 5:25f). Such values need to be reaffirmed in a sexist and unsex culture.

4.1.4 Jesus' commentary on these verses is central to a Christian understanding of sexuality. 'Haven't you read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said, "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh"?' (Matthew 19:4f). By rooting sexuality in God's creative act 'from the beginning' Jesus' words, setting sexual union in the context of marriage, have a relevance for all times and cultures.

4.1.5 The celebration of sexual passion and union in Song of Solomon is a healthy corrective to the negative, dualistic approach that the Church has often adopted. It is a clear Biblical mandate for seeing this gift as a source of pleasure and not merely procreation. It may offer a way of healing for those whose guilt-ridden and damaged view of sexuality has prevented them from enjoying this gift as God intended.

4.2.1 However, much Biblical teaching about sexuality is cast in negative and prohibitive terms. Many passages condemn certain forms of sexual activity as inherently sinful e.g.: incest (Leviticus 18); homosexual acts (Leviticus 18:22); bestiality (Leviticus 20:15,16); rape (Deuteronomy 22:25f); adultery (Matthew 5:27), prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:15), fornication (Galatians 5:19).

Scripture does not treat sexual sin as more heinous and deserving of censure than other sins (as the Church has sometimes tended to do) but often places them in a list along with other faults such as pride, greed, etc. Yet there are a number of passages that speak of God's judgement on sexual immorality in particular (for example Ephesians 5:3-6).

4.2.2 The relationship of Christians to the Law is a crucial issue here. Some members of the Corinthian church seem to have believed, following the spirit of their culture, that if they had faith, 'all things are lawful'. But Paul resists this tendency with his most detailed exposition of sexual ethics and even demanded that one flagrant case of immorality be dealt with severely (1 Corinthians 5:1f). He instructs Christians not to associate with the sexually immoral who are fellow Church members (5:9-11). Similarly, the Church in Thyatira had allowed sexual permissiveness to come in through the influence of a false prophetic and, once again, radical measures are called for (Revelation 2:20f).

4.2.3 Acts portrays the struggle of the early Church to assert the freedom from the Law that the Gospel had brought about. Yet even against the background of this crucial issue, the 'Council of Jerusalem' insisted that all churches be urged to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15:29 & 21:25).

Thus the New Testament follows the Old in teaching that certain sexual acts are wrong per se and are not an option for Christians. Our Lord counselled sexual discipline to His disciples (Matthew 19:12).

4.2.4 Indeed the New Testament goes further and insists that outward conformity to these laws is accompanied by a right attitude within. Accordingly, 'lust' receives much attention; it is the antithesis of love in that it seeks sexual experience as an end in itself, rather than as a means to deepening a relationship in the context of personal commitment. Jesus takes lust very seriously, equating it with the act itself (Matthew 5:28), and calling for radical measures to overcome it (5:29). The Bible gives a number of instances of how easily lust can entice even the godly into actions later to be bitterly regretted, King David being the best known. Ephesians 4:19 touches on the obsessive, even addictive nature of lust, the basis of the whole pornographic industry.

4.2.5 When considering lust, it is important to recognize that sexual desire and fantasy are a normal part of our God-given sexuality. They will always be a part of our humanity without necessarily crossing over the line where they become sinful (Consider James 1:13-15 alongside Matt. 5:28). This is very important for those more scrupulous souls who are sometimes quick to condemn themselves for thoughts which are in fact the product of healthy sexual instincts.

4.2.6 The silence of the Bible regarding masturbation is significant. Associated as it usually is with fantasy, it is not always easy to tell when it is an expression of lust and when merely an outlet for sexual tension. Given Scripture's silence, the Church must guard against making moral judgements too quickly as these may only serve to reinforce those guilt feelings that feed an obsessive preoccupation with the practice. A more honest and open airing of the subject in the life of the Church would be of help to many, especially adolescents.

4.3.1 The Gospel is concerned to redeem every part of our sinful humanity, including our sexuality, by the operation of grace and truth. The New Testament speaks of the need for self-restraint and calls us to 'put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust' (Colossians 3:5). We are to 'learn to control our bodies' in contrast to 'the passionate lusts of the unbelievers' (1 Thessalonians 4:4,5). We are urged to use our bodies in such a way as will bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 6:20). In this passage Paul dramatically asserts that a sexual union involves Christ because the believer's body is a temple of His Spirit (6:15).

4.3.2 Any discussion of sexuality is bound to touch on love and the Bible does recognize the place of romantic, erotic love, and the experience of falling in love. Yet in contrast to the modern preoccupation with romance, the New Testament, through emphasizing the love which is uniquely Christ-like, offers a perspective that transforms and enhances all our loving by showing that the way to self-fulfilment is through self-sacrifice.

4.3.3 In New Testament teaching, this love cannot be separated from obedience to Jesus as Lord (e.g. John 14:15,21). For the Christian, the gift of sexuality (like every gift) is not to be indulged according to the transient dictates of the flesh, but to be employed according to the will of Christ, in the spirit of discipleship. The admonition to 'seek first the Kingdom of Heaven . . . ' applies here as elsewhere.

4.3.4 Jesus is Saviour as well as Lord, and in the Gospel we discover that His gift of mercy and compassion is as generous as His call to obedience is absolute. In coming to seek and to save the lost, Jesus can even speak of prostitutes entering the Kingdom of God ahead of others who seem more righteous. Having become human, He sympathizes with our weakness (including our sexual weakness) (Hebrews 4:15). If the Church is called to uphold Christian standards of sexual morality, she is equally called to embody and express the compassion of One who did not come to judge the world but to save it (John 3:17).

4.3.5 If the Church is going to follow Jesus in becoming known as the 'friend of sinners', she must imitate His openness and honesty. Because of a tendency to repression and denial in the Church, many people are discouraged from facing up to and dealing with those issues of a sexual nature that concern them, dwelling instead in a twilight world of covert actions. The Gospel encourages us to bring things that are hidden into the light (John 3:20,21) and the Church must strive for greater openness in her handling of sexuality. This in turn demands a greater climate of acceptance so that those of us who are struggling with the darker side of our sexuality can find the understanding and love without which it is so difficult to change. The challenge to 'bear one another's burdens' relates to sexual matters as to all others.

4.3.6 These two aspects of obedience and compassion are perfectly expressed in the account of Jesus' encounter with the woman taken in adultery, a story that offers a paradigm for the Church's way of dealing with issues of sexual morality. 'I do not condemn you; go and sin no more' (John 8:11). We must not be afraid to call sin, 'sin', nor to call one another to repentance, even to exercise discipline in certain cases. Yet we must do so in a spirit that positively communicates the love of Jesus for someone overtaken in sin. For, in truth, 'not one of us is righteous, no not one' (Romans 3:10).

4.4.1 As the 1979 Book of Common Order states, marriage is seen in the New Testament as the 'right and proper setting for the full expression of physical love between man and woman'. Jesus' words about 'leaving' mother and father point to the public aspect of sexual union in contrast to the contemporary climate of individualism which sees it as a purely private matter between the parties involved. If we are 'members one of another' (Ephesians 4:25), we must

take seriously the effects of sexual activity on others (especially in the context of an alarming rise in sexually transmitted diseases and the trauma experienced by the 'innocent' parties where adultery occurs). By bringing this public dimension to bear, marriage not only underscores the element of corporate responsibility involved in sexual bonding, but also makes available the support structures of Church and society to help sustain a relationship long term. Jesus' following words about 'cleaving' to one another emphasize the long-term relationship of mutual commitment as the right place for becoming 'one flesh', not least because it is only where mutual trust and respect exist that the deepening enjoyment of sex can be experienced (Proverbs 5:18, 19).

4.4.2 Because sexuality is intimately connected with every aspect of our humanity, it has to be expressed, not repressed. But genital sexual activity is not the only means of expression, as is demonstrated by the fact that both the married and the single state are gifts of God (1 Corinthians 7:7). Sexuality can be expressed in a whole variety of loving relationships and creative activities, as is supremely shown in the life of Jesus Himself. In a culture which has over-eroticized relationships, the Church can help to redress the balance by reaffirming the rich blessings that can be experienced in friendships with members of either sex (for example Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Jesus and Lazarus). The Church is uniquely placed to provide opportunities for men and women to cultivate relationships of depth and intimacy, especially in recognition of the very real sexual pressures that can be experienced by single people. Society can be very cruel in making unfair demands and raising unrealistic expectations as regarding sexual activity. All that is said in this section is especially relevant for those of a same-sex orientation.

4.5.1 As the Gospel spread throughout the Roman empire, the Church increasingly came into contact with sexual practices of a permissive and often perverted nature (1 Peter 4:3). Far from compromising, the Church fought to maintain her standards of sexual morality, even when it meant ridicule and abuse (1 Peter 4:4). This distinctively Christian witness is what enabled her to be salt and light to the world, even to the extent of being accused of 'turning the world upside down'. The Church faces a similar challenge today and only by remaining faithful to the example and teaching of Christ can she retain her salience (Matthew 5:13). Any change in her position on sexuality that does not have a clear Biblical basis will compromise her ability to speak to the world in the Name of Christ.

4.5.2 In the past, the Church allowed Hellenistic and Gnostic influences abroad in society to weaken her hold on Biblical teaching, with the result that celibacy came to be seen as the highest expression of faith and devotion. Today, the Church needs to ask in what direction the currents in society are pulling her. Now as then we need the light of Scripture to help guide us in the narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14).

4.6.1 There is, however, within the Christian community, a different perspective. There are many, no less committed to interpreting 'the light of Scripture' in the quest for fullness of life, who understand the phrase "Biblical teaching" rather differently from the approach that forms the basis of the preceding paragraphs. This they would argue, does not undermine the authority of Scripture as 'the supreme rule of faith and life'; it is rather to explore and question the precise nature of that authority, indeed even to reinforce it, by focusing attention on the Word in Jesus Christ eternal rather than the words (the particular Biblical texts as transmitted, influenced by their own time and culture), and on our struggle to understand and appropriate the significance of this in our own time.

4.6.2 The difficulties and differences, which are of both theological and psychological character, between the two approaches can scarcely be overestimated. On the one hand, there is the approach, which, at its most conservative, seeks to read off from specific Biblical texts and passages rules which are universally applicable; or, more liberally, is prepared to be selective to a degree but still founds unequivocally on, and quotes from, the words of Scripture. The alternative approach, which is being explored briefly here, sees the scriptural tradition as more open-ended and organic: what we are confronted with in the Bible is not a set of detailed rules, not even a collection of absolute general principles or transferable values that can readily be applied to the sorts of situations that confront us, but a compendium of accounts of God's relationship with His people over a significant period of history, through a critical and decisive series of events. We are obliged in the here and now, our discernment enhanced by

the presence and power of God's Spirit, to make sense of that relationship for ourselves, to apply the insights of Scripture to our own time and place, to derive a Christian ethic of understanding concerning current issues that will stand up against the evidence not only of Scripture but also of contemporary knowledge and experience.

4.6.3 Behind every scriptural text lies a context, and behind every reading of Scripture lies a pre-text the subjectivity, a complex blend of assumptions, prejudices and personal history, that every reader brings. The reality is that no reading of Scripture can be entirely non-selective; and it is unnecessary to quote a range of instances in which there is no dispute about setting aside usually on the basis of the different historical or cultural context what the Bible prescribes. But contextual differences do not justify the view that the Bible has nothing at all to say to the modern world. Rather they intensify the challenge to understand more fully both the Biblical and the contemporary context and thereby deepen and extend our insights into the mystery and miracle of the divine-human relationship, and into what is required of us now, through what has been helpfully described as a 'merging of horizons . . . (a) double act of imagination reading ourselves into the world of the Bible, and reading ourselves back into our own world . . . under the guidance of the Holy Spirit' (United Reformed Church, 1991).

4.6.4 So the alternative approach also seeks to see the Bible whole, centring and turning upon the Jesus-event. It cannot avoid being selective to a degree, because the intrinsic variety of Scripture makes this inevitable. But it traces a consistent theme that has to do with the fulfilment through recognizing its part in the new creation that has been inaugurated and affirmed in Jesus Christ.

4.6.5 In relation to human sexuality in general, the insights to be derived from this alternative approach to Scripture do not differ greatly from the thrust of the preceding paragraphs, emphasizing sexuality as both divine gift and human responsibility. But, as indicated, for example, in section 8 below, they may point in rather different, less conclusive directions on specific issues.

4.6.6 The starting-point and focus must be the unconditional love of God and God's call to human beings to repent and share in and contribute to the fulfilment of the divine purpose through the development of right relationships with Himself and in self-giving love in and for community. This will inevitably tend to emphasize the quality of relationships (integrity, commitment, intimacy). Such an emphasis, founded on scriptural and other evidence, points towards a Christian ethical imperative, for the context for the full, physical expression of sexuality, of faithful lasting relationships rooted in mutual self-giving love.

4.6.7 This is not necessarily to undermine or reduce, for instance, the significance of marriage as such in terms of its legal status, public ceremony or, where appropriate, religious event; but it is to recognize certain psychological social realities. First, all relationships, including marriages, are flawed, and may involve disloyalty, even brutality and, whatever the original intention, may not turn out to be permanent. Secondly, some cohabiting relationships are based on lasting mutual commitment (in effect a private contract) and, in the attitudes of the partners towards one another and others, reflect and express self-giving love.

4.6.8 Furthermore, such emphasis clearly calls in question and leaves no room for the permissive attitudes to sexual intercourse often fostered by the media and widely evident in particular within contemporary youth culture. What is often described as 'casual cohabitation' (dating assumes willingness to have sexual intercourse) trivializes relationships and is an abuse of God's gift of sexuality, for without the context of self-forgetting commitment, sexual intercourse is merely a form of self-indulgence, hedonistic and exploitative, and potentially damaging to all those concerned.

5. HUMAN SEXUALITY: PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

5.1.1 Human life and awareness develop through a pattern of relationships, beginning in the mother's womb. The close relationship with the body and the closeness of daily nourishment and care at birth and later all influence development.

5.1.2 Human beings further enjoy a range of relationships with others from the day of birth. These relationships vary in quality and in the degree of closeness experienced in them; some may be casual acquaintances; some deeply intimate; some warm and supporting, others humorous and teasing; others may be ambivalent and contain a degree of anger and rivalry. Relationships vary according to the role a person occupies. From early childhood, people are learning how to cope with these relationships in order to achieve a level of satisfaction and happiness. People learn to differentiate what is appropriate behaviour for different types of relationship.

5.1.3 For people who have learning disabilities, such learning may not have taken place, or the wrong things may have been learned. This may be due to a number of factors such as institutional care, lack of a close parent-child relationship, or a succession of caring figures, including the patterns of shift system within residential care and fostering.

5.1.4 Human beings depend heavily on communication and in particular on speech in all relationships. It is harder to get to know a person who is handicapped by lack of speech or by sight and sound impairment. Often such people are given too little individual attention because they cannot express feelings and thoughts in ways which others can easily understand and identify with.

5.1.5 Sexual relationships and sexual behaviour are only part of the wider context of personal relationships, and people with learning disabilities have the same right as others to a range of relationships which will be enriching to them in a variety of ways. They need assistance in developing their relationships and careful counselling as the relationships develop.

5.2.1 It must be recognized that people as whole human beings come first and that learning disabilities and physical disabilities are secondary to their feelings, desires and need of personal (including sexual) relationships.

5.2.2 The definition of appropriate sexual behaviour will vary according to the value system and moral beliefs of the people or organization with whom a person lives. There is a vital place for the family home where teenagers can discuss and argue in order to establish their own viewpoint when they move on to live on their own. For people with learning disabilities who need to live along with others for support, there is often less guidance and less opportunity for discussion, especially if they live within institutional or secondary care.

5.2.3 Dependent people often require assistance of an intimate personal nature, and this must be done in a respectful way, and the feelings of the person recognized as paramount. Privacy in many instances has been, and still is, absent, particularly in institutional care with regard to communal sleeping, eating, bathing and lavatory arrangements.

5.2.4 Young people also have difficulty in learning about their own bodies. This relates not only to sexual development but also to basic bodily functions. Sensitive education is essential for them to learn about puberty and physical change. To be educated properly about all issues concerning themselves, including sexual development, is the right of all young people and no less so of those who have learning disabilities. The current lack of easily identified 'family' units and groups is a major cause of ignorance in many young people who later find themselves in difficulties with relationships, both in their own groups and the wider community.

5.3.1 People with learning disabilities are attracted to members of the opposite sex in exactly the same way as those who do not have handicaps. However, as with other areas of behaviour, they may not find it so easy to express their feelings in appropriate ways. An adult with learning disabilities may express his/her attraction to a member of the opposite sex by being unduly forward and touching or embracing inappropriately. Within a family situation, this may be allowed to continue as part of the general care and love for each other. It should be remembered that this behaviour, while it is not wrong or abnormal, is simply an attempt to express normal feelings, in a way which may not be socially acceptable in wider circles.

5.3.2 Relationships may proceed into deeper courtship or marriage and must be given appropriate recognition. In the development of community care, practical issues are identified in relation to the question of partners, marriage, accommodation, neighbourhood for living and the understanding of the community at large.

5.3.3 The law of marriage makes no distinction between those with and those without learning disabilities. However, the officiant (minister or registrar) should be satisfied that the

persons concerned understand the nature of the intended commitment they are making. Where one or both partners is severely handicapped, a safeguard could be provided by having certificates signed by professionals who may be a family doctor or project leader—stating that in their opinion A and B understand the nature of the undertaking of marriage. As cohabiting does not entail contract-making in a formal sense, these laws do not pertain.

5.4 Another practical issue is that of contraception. This is a medical treatment and therefore can be given only with the consent of the individual. This can be a difficult area on account of the person's level of understanding and personal development in relationships. In cases of suspected sexual abuse or promiscuity, the question of sterilisation may also arise. Further issues in which people with learning disabilities may come to be involved will include:—abortion; pornography; an adequate understanding of what is involved in sexual relationships; information about condoms, H.I.V., other sexually transmitted diseases, hepatitis, and possibly about provision of testing; on all these matters will not be easy to protect with regard to sexual activity. Agreement on all these matters will not be easy to achieve. What is done, however, must take account of the capacity for understanding of the individual concerned; it must as far as possible respect his/her choices; and perhaps most of all it must be sensitive to the complexity involved in any personal commitment.

5.5 Agencies such as Barnardo's, Enable (Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped), Brook Advisory Clinic, have investigated the implications of sexuality in human relationships and their work is available for consultation. For its part, the Board wishes to affirm that if we understand God's gift of sexuality as part of the richness of relationships and as a means of achieving a full sense of one's identity then there is an obligation to support the opportunity to do this for all God's people, including those with learning disabilities.

6. HUMAN SEXUALITY: PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

6.1 Sexuality is completely bound up with human life; from our cell and body structure to the complete way in which we respond and relate to other people. All human life is precious and much loved by its Creator. All people, well or unwell, disabled or fit, are equal in God's sight and in His love. Our individual worth does not depend on our abilities, intelligence, strength of character, but on the fact that we have been made in the likeness of God.

6.2.1 Being or becoming disabled can be a major psychological blow to an individual. This is particularly true when a person relatively young in years is struck down by trauma or a disabling disease. The concept of bodily esteem can be, or is then almost lost. Disabled people still have the emotional need of, and inwardly cry for acceptance, gentle bodily contact and intimate loving support. This is particularly important for disabled people themselves, their husbands, wives, lovers, friends, families and carers.

6.2.2 The statement made in I Samuel 16:7 is particularly relevant in this context.

'Do not consider his appearance or his height. God does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.'

Today's society gives disabled people little choice about the identity which they create, because it rarely takes the trouble to look behind the external appearance of an individual's disability. People tend to lack the courage or imagination to visualize themselves in a similar position and assess what the implications for themselves would be. Neither does society consider the social facilities, commitment, relationships or bonding which need to be available for disabled people. Today, it is rarely the actual experience of disability which destroys the individual, but rather the public response.

6.2.3 Where a couple are disabled, whether one or both, consideration needs to be given to the assistance required in forming close friendships. Whether man or woman, or two

teenagers, help may be needed in forming and developing loving relationships with sharing touch and bodily contact. In the event of marriage taking place, further assistance might be necessary to facilitate the accomplishment of full penetrative sexual intercourse.

6.3.1 To give concrete illustration of some of the problems, stresses and trauma of loving sexual and marital relations, the following examples are given.

6.3.2 The first one is biographical. A couple, who married at relatively young ages, built up very close, strong, emotional and physical relationships in their marriage. The husband, however, developed a degenerative illness, which began gently but eventually galloped, so that he became a shell of what he had once been, frail, and unable to communicate verbally. His wife continued, with support, to care for him at home, but found the final trauma was when he was permanently catheterized. Not only did this frustrate her need for genital sexual relationships, it also deprived her in a most devastating way of the closest, most loving and supportive contact with her husband that she could have.

6.3.3.1 The second example is autobiographical. "When your body is thin and not functioning properly, it is a struggle to maintain a mental image of your whole, preserved, sexual identity. It is particularly necessary for people to have the concept of their own identity and inner soul as complete before God. This is difficult but extremely important for people with disabilities. The community perceives the person's outer shell as bruised or diminished; so essential positive confirmation of gender has to be built up internally by that person alone. Society's assumptions with regard to many people with disabilities, particularly those using wheelchairs or having mobility problems, tend to relegate them virtually to the status of eunuch.

6.3.3.2 "My sexual identity remained profound and strong even throughout the time when paralysis was virtually total. At one point, a brief encatheterisation, necessary to bring relief from urinary retention, was an embarrassing affront. For, although I had had serious relationships with several boyfriends, I had managed to maintain the decision which I had made early in my years as a Christian teenager that the first man to have intercourse with me would be my husband on our wedding night.

6.3.3.3 "God knows that I would love to have the caring, understanding love and support of a devoted Christian husband—like Ephesians 5: 21-33. However, very few men I have known, or have come to know, are capable of coping emotionally with my survival, and with the reason for the level of rehabilitation currently achieved. During these last good years, the few men with whom I have had friendships and loving relationships (which might have developed into marriage) have balked at the challenge and have opted for wives with nice, simple, less threatening histories and backgrounds. The very few men whom I have met who have the understanding to accept or were already married. I can understand the fear and apprehension of male friends with whom I have had close emotional relationships, but that still leaves me with the feeling of inner loneliness and desolation unresolved. I still have the bodily ache of the unsupported hemiplegic trying to keep themselves on their feet without the envelopment of supportive loving protective arms for brief but necessary times. In this God keeps on saying 'Rely on me'.

6.3.3.4 "Although the longing is still there, yet I know that 'for the sake of Christ, I am content with weakness' for in Him, when I am weak then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10). I survive the strain of living a generally friendly but busy working life, with my disability having been reduced to a stage where I can cope on my feet and live by myself, but where I do not have the closeness of the ongoing love, care, spiritual closeness and mutually committed support of a husband. I survive the consequent hollowness and loneliness through my dependence on Jesus and weekly communion. This is an indication towards the cost of keeping a sociable Christian woman self-outpouring, with very limited and infrequent positive loving feedback of any degree of intimacy. Chastity is not easy and lonely chastity is even harder. Temporary pleasure pleases, but it is powerless to quench the ache that exists in the soul."

6.3.4 Such testimonies underline how important it is for everyone to treat the chronically ill or disabled person as a full person in every respect. Care must be taken to check the often unconscious tendency to stereotype and categorize the other person's sexuality and sexual needs into a different, lesser, diminished level than one's own. It will, nevertheless, take time,

conscious effort, awareness and control to deal with one's own position, and then by relating constructively to help the disabled individuals help themselves. Once this is achieved, then there is the possibility that together the barriers may be broken down both in the professions and in general society.

7. HUMAN SEXUALITY: ELDERLY PEOPLE

7.1.1 Sexuality is an integral part of personhood: there is therefore no upper age-limit when its expression, in some form, ceases to be appropriate for any individual man or woman. The need for the deep sense of security gained by physical closeness is felt profoundly by the new-born infant and recurs in varying levels of intensity throughout life: this need is heightened at moments of crisis and the security of this 'safe intimacy' is valued greatly, though it is often unspoken, by the elderly couple who have shared much in their lives together.

7.1.2 For the elderly couple who have been together over the years, the continuing expression of their sexuality poses no problems. They are in tune with each other's needs and are able to satisfy those needs, adapting and altering the ways they express their togetherness as is appropriate. But for the elderly person whose partner becomes infirm or disabled, it is important that society, in its well-meaning efforts to help, should not ignore this fundamental aspect of a relationship which is changing in character, and the needs of both partners who may seem temporarily out of tune with each other. The stereotype of elderly persons having reached a 'non-sexual age' must be firmly discounted. Negative attitudes from carers and often from grown-up sons and daughters of the elderly couple must be confronted. The elderly persons themselves may have been indoctrinated with the idea that sexual desire and activity should cease and sensitive counselling may be needed to relieve secret feelings of guilt or shame. Too often, public attitudes have shown disapproval or ridicule which have undermined intimate relationships.

7.1.3 The elderly person who is living alone or in a residential setting may be faced with other difficulties which compound feelings of bereavement or isolation. Carers can be rigid in their attempts to be 'non-sexual', allowing no opportunity of touching or of the slightest physical caress: to the lonely elderly person, such distancing in attitude is an affront and the recognition of this need or longing for affection brings sadness and shame. For the young person working in a residential setting, it is vital that these negative attitudes are explored and discussed, while at the same time staff must be open about their difficulties and ways found to ensure that they are not placed in an impossibly vulnerable position.

7.1.4 Institutional or residential care is usually provided by caring, trained staff who are physically and emotionally very close to residents. It is essential that the dignity and courtesy of privacy are paramount in such care, recognising that the frail and confused person has contributed to life in a variety of roles. Practices may be indulged in to give comfort and relief and staff must be trained to understand this and to accept that masturbation or genital touching are part of the pattern of coping. Staff, in turn, must be protected against physical advances by working in pairs or being allocated to individual residents as *their* carer.

7.1.5 Special concern is needed for the partner who has to become a carer, especially where the changed relationship is brought about by illness such as dementia, in which the whole personality of the loved one seems to have altered. There is a sense of loss and bereavement, the more poignant because physically the loved person is still present. This may be aggravated by fatigue and ill-health and frequently by embarrassment, yet within this relationship the needs of both partners remain, though their character and modes of expression have altered. Carers and counsellors must be aware of these needs and be sympathetic to both partners, recognizing that it is difficult to speak of something so private as sexual intimacy to a stranger, however well disposed.

7.1.6 For partners who face separation consequent on institutionalization or other cause, to be given the opportunity to have times of physical closeness in private may go a long way towards restoring a sense of self-worth and dispelling anxiety and insecurity. The ways we choose to express our sexuality have developed over years of togetherness; breaking these bonds cannot be done without pain. While genital sexuality may not be a chosen mode of

expression for an elderly person, there are many other ways in which we respond to each other's sexuality. In Christ's name we care for one another as whole persons, including always our sexuality, from birth to the moment of dying.

8. HUMAN SEXUALITY: HOMOSEXUALITY

8.1 Homosexuality is one area which arouses strong emotions. In using the word here, reference is being made to same-sex attraction on the part of both men and women. It is important to see this not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of the wide spectrum of feeling and practice that is human sexuality. In speaking of homosexuality, it is necessary to explore both the issue of orientation and resulting practices. The expression of one's sexuality also covers a much wider range of actions and activities than genital behaviour. Moreover, it is a gross misrepresentation, as still occurs all too frequently, to link homosexual practice with paedophilia and child abuse. These are much more frequent amongst heterosexuals than homosexuals. It has been our aim to relate thinking about homosexuality to what the Church believes and teaches about human sexuality in general.

8.2.1 Already in the report, there has been demonstrated the basis of some scriptural teaching which sees sexuality itself as a gift of God to be enjoyed, for itself and as a way of realising and fulfilling the richness of our human being in relationship. This understanding has been rediscovered in the last two generations after many years when sex was seen as something to be tolerated but limited to the procreation of the species, and full of danger and evil potential. Indications have also been given of the extent to which sexuality lies at the heart of our self-hood and sense of identity, developing with us from the beginning of life. In the light of this, how are those who find themselves attracted to someone of their own sex to express their sexuality in their living and relating? Such fulfilment and realisation will follow many pathways including possibly genital satisfaction. In view of the difficulties inherent in this question, it seems logical to ask to what extent those of the minority orientation of homosexuality are to be free to enjoy God's gift of sexuality. Since sexuality is an essential part of a person's identity, can this be denied without severe psychological and emotional damage?

8.2.2 While there may be no easy answers to this dilemma, the Board would suggest that the Church needs to talk about and reflect on several key issues in a spirit of mutual respect, and to listen to the cry of those of a homosexual orientation within the Church. Three such issues can be identified. First there is the question of what causes this orientation towards others of the same sex. Second, there is the central issue of how we use and interpret Scripture. The third area, which is closely related to the second, is that of culture, including medical and scientific awareness and psychological understanding. Not only need we consider the impact of our own cultural context; we also have to consider the cultural setting in which scripture was given.

8.3.1 If we could be certain that sexual orientation was entirely a matter of choice, then it would clearly be an area where moral issues are concerned. On the other hand, if we could be certain that sexual orientation was something genetically 'given', then we would need to question how morals properly enter into its evaluation where no choice can be freely made. It would be like red hair and left-handedness. The reality is much more confused and confusing. Many homosexuals, if they reflect on it, would realize that their attraction to the opposite sex was something that was 'just there'. Many homosexuals would claim that this was also their experience and that their sexual orientation was genetically given or deeply implanted by early nurture experience. Scientific data—or its interpretation—is divided on this matter and contenders are easily drawn to emphasize those results that back up the position they hold: there is no such thing as absolute objectivity! At this stage, we have to act without knowing which way future discoveries may point. There is further confusion; for example, there are those who are best described as bi-sexual, being attracted to their own sex and the opposite sex at one and the same time, at different times in their lives, or in some other varied pattern. Account must also be taken of the fact that for a number of adolescents, homosexual feelings are a passing phase, a natural part of growing and maturing, from which most will move on quite naturally to heterosexuality. There are also those for whom homosexual activity is the

result of being in a situation where normal relations with the opposite sex are not possible or not permitted.

8.3.2.1 Those who see sexual orientation chiefly as a matter of choice lay great stress on the claim that homosexuals can be 'cured'. Here again, the evidence is conflicting. Some who wish to be 'cured' in the first place certainly seem to respond to therapy. Others, who want to, can be helped to live in abstinence, acknowledging their orientation but not practising or expressing their sexuality in genital terms. There still seems to be a significant number for whom 'treatment' is neither effective nor helpful. There are those who would say that since sexuality is not a matter of choice, far less affliction, treatment is not relevant.

8.3.2.2 In speaking of cure, it is of course important to emphasize that this is not referring to the experience of young people in adolescence already spoken of, where the feelings will change naturally. Every care must be taken to make sure that young people are aware of this process so that they do not prematurely assume themselves to be unalterably set in a same-sex orientation for life.

8.3.2.3 For Christians who believe sexuality is God's gift and who also see it as part of a person's identity, two questions need to be asked. If sexual orientation is part of identity, what is the effect on people of being asked to deny this reality—and is it right to ask someone to do that? The other question is simply how someone 'enjoys' the particular gift of sexuality that God has given?

8.4.1 The second issue is the witness of Scripture. We affirm our belief in the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as our supreme rule of faith and life. The question we must ask, however, is 'What is the Bible saying to us, here in our situation, today?'

8.4.2 Since the teaching of Scripture is crucial in this as in other issues of faith and life, the Board feels it necessary to take time to set out what it sees as the prime issue which determines what we hear Scripture saying—namely the assumptions that people bring to the interpretation of Scripture. In the report on human sexuality submitted to (but not accepted by over 90% of) the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. in 1991, the basic division in approach was demonstrated. The majority report, reflected a 'liberal' approach to Scripture while the minority report came from a 'conservative' standpoint. Both standpoints were agreed on a wide range of issues; but they diverged over the question of how Scripture might be interpreted with regard to homosexual practice. This divergence raises the question how, in view of the differing interpretative starting places, the Bible functions authoritatively or even usefully in such a situation. There is every reason to believe that the same divergent standpoints exist in the Church of Scotland. In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to set out the main points in the two positions and to address the question of how the Church can hold within itself the conflicting views on a matter which affects not just private actions but matters of faith in Christ and Church discipline, which are very public.

8.4.3 While the 'liberal' side of the debate would readily acknowledge the Bible as 'the supreme rule of faith and life' for a Reformed Church like the Church of Scotland, several features of how this operates today would require to be taken into consideration. It would claim that there has been a shift away from a doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Equally, culture as it develops has forced the Church to search the Bible for new guidance and insights which in turn have influenced culture. In Scripture itself, texts can be identified which support alternative understandings or beliefs. Such a liberal approach seeks for guidance in the broad message of Scripture as it celebrates sexuality as part of God's good creation and presents the importance of all sexual relations being grounded in mutual respect, genuine care, and justice. It would also want to bring the insights of modern studies—sociological, psychological and biological—to bear on Scripture and, if need be, re-interpret its witness in the light of such insights.

8.4.4 The more traditional or 'conservative' approach to Biblical authority would adopt a different stance. The attempt to modify the strict and literal command of Scripture would be seen as just one example of a widespread tendency to distrust the Bible's teaching on any matter. The Reformation emphasis on 'Scripture alone' as the basis for knowing God's will would be seen as a central truth to be found in the Bible itself. Lack of knowledge of Biblical teaching and Biblical theology would be cited as the reason why other cultural considerations

are given so much weight. Due weight would certainly be given to insights and understanding derived from modern knowledge. Not a few in this position would accept that a homosexual orientation was compatible with membership of the Church and indeed ministry. They could not, however, on the basis of their understanding of Biblical authority, countenance certain acts or practices that might be engaged in as a result of the orientation. The liberal position would be challenged for yielding to the pressure of contemporary culture and accommodating its teaching to it. The conservative view would claim to be based firmly on the Word of God in Scripture and 2,000 years of Church teaching.

8.4.5.1 Several issues emerge from this that bear upon any appeal to Scriptural guidance. First, there is a need to register and recognize the fact that there are these divergent views as to how Scriptural authority functions within Churches which accept the Reformation principle of Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and life. The implicit question is whether there is room for such divergent views in the Church of Scotland. The Bible is not self-interpreting, as is evident from the major divisions which emerged within the Reformed tradition, each claiming Biblical authority for its position. The question is not, "Do we accept the authority of the Bible?" but rather, "What is the nature of that authority, and how does it function within the Church today?"

8.4.5.2 The Biblical passages central to the discussion of homosexuality are: Lev. 18:22, Lev. 20:13, the stories in Gen. 19:1-11, and Judg. 19:16-30, Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Tim. 1:8-11, and Jude 7. These texts have been endlessly discussed in recent years. It seems clear—in spite of attempts to prove otherwise—that, if we are concerned simply with the meaning of these texts, male homosexual acts are condemned both in the Old and New Testaments and lesbianism equally so in Rom. 1. Conversely, there are no texts which speak approvingly of homosexual acts. There are many within the Church for whom this is, and always will be, the end of the argument.

8.4.6.1 There is the question, next, about the nature of the material in the Bible and to what extent, both in its language and its concepts, it is culturally conditioned. This is accepted by everyone to some extent. We are not Israel, nor the early Church; their worlds are not our world. For example, slavery is no longer accepted; nor is the Jewish Sabbath celebrated. It is no longer believed that the way to deal with a rebellious son who is a wastrel and a drunkard is to take him out and stone him to death. It is no longer generally accepted that Paul said the last word on the place and the role of women within the Church. In the light of this, where might homosexuality fit into the scheme of things?

8.4.6.2 In general terms, a distinction may be made between time-conditioned social customs and assumptions and what must be regarded as timeless authoritative Biblical mandates. These might be characterized as 'rules' and 'principles' respectively. Many in the Church of Scotland regard the prohibition of homosexual practices as coming in the category of timeless and Biblical 'principles'. There are, however, those in our Church who would hold that the principle which matters is living faithfully, lovingly and in right-relatedness in all our relationships, regardless of sexual orientation. For them, the judgements on homosexuality are time-conditioned and, as an expression of a structure of thought about society and sexuality, are not integral to the Gospel, but tied to ancient society as such. They come, therefore, into the 'rules' category.

8.4.6.3 For example in the Leviticus passages, where the dominating concept is holiness and purity, these rules may be seen as typical of those which function to define one society over and against another. For Christians, the differentiating factor that makes them holy is being called by God through repentance into new life regardless of sexual orientation. In the same way it may be argued that in Romans 1 Paul is addressing the issue of moral perversity in the world of his day, perversity which he traces to idolatry and to a refusal to recognise the revelation of the one true God. But is this judgement relevant to the concerns of gay and lesbian Christians today who believe that their sexual orientation is God-given and who value a committed and loving relationship in which there is mutuality and respect? The possibility that homosexual orientation is a naturally occurring variation would be seen by some as good reason to reassess our doctrine of creation as it relates to sexuality.

8.4.6.4 The argument from marriage that intercourse is solely for procreation needs to be questioned. The 1979 Book of Common Order indicates that the principal end of marriage is

'companionship, comfort, and joy'. In other words, it is the quality of the relationship which is paramount and in this context sexuality plays a significant part. Sexuality, therefore, serves primarily to initiate, cement, and enrich relationships. Procreation is a 'second order' function of sexuality, ordained of God but not its main role, which is to do with relationship. It is clear that many human partnerships display valued and sought-for qualities and we must ask whether such relationships, which include the possibility of genital sexuality, are to be denied to those who are of the same sex.

8.4.7 In the light then of the divergent conclusions which are evident among those who seek to have a dialogue with Scripture on the particular issue of homosexuality, is there anywhere the Church can go from here? Is it simply and sadly the case that this is a dialogue which begins from opposite ends—the one Biblical, the other modernist and culturally conditioned—with the parties passing each other in the middle? This must bring us back to the question referred to in section 8.4.2. Is there room in the Church of Scotland for these divergent positions to sit side by side, to speak together and, most importantly, to agree to differ, and still to co-exist in the same Church. Is it possible to acknowledge that there is no Biblical stance uninfluenced by cultural factors; and no cultural stance within the Christian tradition which has not been influenced by Biblical assumptions? Since it seems unlikely that an agreement on interpretation of Scripture will be reached on this matter any more than on others, no matter how sensitively people seek to listen to each other, the Church might well be advised to proceed tolerantly, cautiously, and wisely. Even if a majority in Assembly—or in Church—vote for one position today, that does not guarantee that it will stand for ever as the mind of the Church of Scotland. A not too exhaustive study of Church history can reveal a disturbing number of cases where yesterday's heresy is today's truth. In the uncertain and worrying seas of change, some consideration of the 'golden rule' (Luke 6:36—*Whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt to you in return*) might serve the whole Church well in this and other matters arising from interpretation of Scripture.

8.5.1 Finally, in considering the effect of contemporary culture, the position is not clear cut. There is evidence of a great deal of prejudice against homosexuals. This is revealed not only in outbursts of physical violence but by the many insensitive and hurtful jokes and remarks made about homosexuals by all manner of people. There are grounds for concluding that our culture is homophobic. In opposition to this, the Church of Scotland must condemn physical and verbal violence against homosexual people. Many 'liberals' and 'conservatives' are united in calling for respect for members of the homosexual minority and in condemning any kind of stigmatisation. In the submissions received from the 'conservative' standpoint, the need for compassion and pastoral care was strongly emphasized. There would appear to be a consensus within the Church protesting against the treatment often meted out to the homosexual minority in the population.

8.5.2 Attention needs to be directed to the highly charged emotional atmosphere surrounding this issue, and to the question of how much of this is generated by anger at Scriptural teaching being transgressed and how much comes from unconscious fears and feelings. Minority groups not infrequently appear threatening and give rise to all sorts of fantasies about their behaviour—the early Christians were one such group! People are threatened by the challenge to acknowledge aspects in themselves which are denied or repressed. For the most part, psychologists agree that homosexual tendencies are present in each person, laid aside by most as sexual identity firms up in adolescence.

8.6 In conclusion, the Board recognizes that for many in the Church of Scotland, their view about homosexuality would still be the one outlined in the 1983 Report. Questions about causation, alternative interpretations of Scripture, and cultural factors are not enough to alter that view. At the same time, the Board would also recognize that in the Church of Scotland there are some who are convinced that in the light of scientific evidence, socio-psychological understanding, critical scholarship and personal testimony, the view of homosexual practice as necessarily sinful can no longer be held with integrity and sincerity.

9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The Board, in approaching this study of human sexuality, has endeavoured to take seriously the understanding and insights available from both the human sciences and the teaching of

Scripture. In practice, for a good many years, sexuality in its wide range of facets has increasingly come to be looked on as a blessing and a gift from God, to be enjoyed and experienced without shame or guilt, recognising that for the Church the genital expression of sexuality has always been within the marriage bond. As a result too of other changes in society, it has become possible to recognise that its primary function lies in creating and enriching relationships, rather than existing principally for the biological function of procreation. The report has attempted to highlight and affirm these attitudes as being fully in accord with a Christian viewpoint.

9.2 On the basis of the understanding of the place of sexuality in establishing identity and personhood, contributing to the quality of relationships, the study went on to explore the implications for groups whose opportunity to express their sexuality is inhibited by different factors. These range from physical and mental capacity to the strictures of public opinion and the traditional teaching of the Church. In these sections concerns have been raised that derive from our understanding of the place of sexuality set forth in the first part of the Report (Sections 3 & 4), and the Board invites the Church (and the wider public) to recognise the injustice that is often unwittingly done and the ensuing impoverishment of people's humanity and identity.

9.3 While there was a high measure of agreement over most issues in the Study Group and the Board, this was not the case with regard to homosexuality. In that section, the Report has set out a considerable length the two perspectives that are presently held within the Church of Scotland, and in particular on the interpretation of Scripture. This is the key area of disagreement.

9.4 In recognising and respecting these different approaches, therefore, the Board recommends that Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions, and congregations should discuss the Report sensitively and constructively with a view to achieving tolerance and fuller mutual understanding, and a deeper obedience to God's will.

DISSENT

In submitting its Report on Human Sexuality, the Board of Social Responsibility advises the General Assembly that the Report was approved by a majority, with three members of the Board entering their dissent, namely,

P. H. CASHMAN
B. K. GARDNER
A. J. MACKICHAN

Taking advantage of the Board's willingness to record the basis of their dissent, Mr Mackichan submits the following comments:

I dissent from the Report on Human Sexuality believing it unworthy of our Church for three related reasons as follows:

1. In its opening statements, this report fails to locate our sexuality in our "fallen" nature.
2. In its sections on biological development, the report fails to follow into a section on spiritual development, answering sex-sin through the agency of Christ's Spirit among His people.
3. For these fundamental reasons, and in its conclusions, the report fails to proclaim the Christian option of a redeemed sexuality.

A. J. MACKICHAN

APPENDIX 1

STUDY GROUP MEMBERS

Rev. J. Stevenson (Convener June-November 1992)—Parish Minister
Rev. D. E. McClements (Convener November 1992-May 1994)—Parish Minister
Dr D. A. E. Mowat (Vice-Convener)—Medical Practitioner
The Very Rev. Professor R. Davidson*—University Lecturer
Rev. C. D. Park—Parish Minister
Rev. B. Robertson—Parish Minister
Rev. N. J. Shanks*—University Lecturer
Rev. A. M. Wells*—(until 1.2.1994) Minister
Mrs E. A. Connon—Psychologist
Miss M. M. Leitch*—Social Worker
Mrs Ann Watt—(until 31.12.1992) Social Worker
* non-members of the Board

The Social Interests Officer, Miss K. J. Gibbs, serviced the Study Group, and Mr D. J. Kellock, Deputy Director, had responsibility for liaising between the Study Group and the Department.

APPENDIX 2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mr David Wright, Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh
Dr Elizabeth Duncan, Consultant Gynaecologist, World Health Organisation
Rev. Dr Kenneth Boyd, Institute of Medical Ethics, Edinburgh
Mrs Elizabeth Templeton, Freelance Theologian
Mr James Liddell, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, Edinburgh

The Study Group records thanks to all individuals, Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions, Christian Organisations and staff of the Board's residential units who responded so helpfully to the Group's invitation to submit comment; in total the Study Group received over one hundred replies.

APPENDIX 3

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QUOTATIONS FROM RESPONSES TO THE STUDY GROUP ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

"Birth is the first sexual act we are all involved in. We do not think of it as a sexual act but it is the outcome of our parents' union. We rarely think of our parents as sexual people. Marriage makes sex legitimate and the attitude towards children born within marriage is still very different to the circumstances of children born to single parents although attitudes have changed towards couples who have children outwith marriage."

"In our society it is impossible to talk about sex without also talking about power. As part of their socialisation, boys learn that sexual activity, but more especially heterosexual intercourse, is an important means of proving their masculinity, with all its privileges, status and rewards that implies."

"Sex is wholesome and sinless when it involves people who take responsibility for themselves and each other, when they are committed to each other, where the relationship is of equals not a matter of one partner's power being exercised over the other, but a mutual giving and receiving of partners in love."

"Celibacy does not mean the absence of sexual desire but even those who have made vows of celibacy find them difficult to keep."

"Teenagers should know of the eventual harm to the human body done by anal and early intercourse. All perversions and indulgence have their long term as well as their short term consequences, and our young people need to be warned. Sex education in our schools lacks sound medical as well as moral guidance and the Church must give the truth."

"It was not until I reached my teens and my sexuality came into my consciousness that I began to feel my different physical appearance. So much seemed to depend on being good looking and that I felt I was not. I have never felt I could trust a man enough, or that he would understand me enough for me to contemplate marriage and sex without marriage was out of the question, both from a religious and social point of view, so I sublimated my sexual emotions into my teaching."

"Choosing not to have a sexual relationship was not considered a serious option. Sex was widely regarded as part of a normal relationship and many could not imagine making a decision not to have sex. Obviously the Church has a massive credibility gap to bridge here. Whilst it may consider abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage to be the ideal, it has to acknowledge that the reality for most young people today is one of pre-marital sex, sometimes with several partners, and that is if they choose to marry at all; many do not."

"For a single woman approaching the menopause, there is a sense of bereavement for the children she will never have, even if marriage is still a possibility. And finally, quite apart from any sexual needs, there is the human need for touch—plain ordinary cuddles! as a single adult Scot, I find that with a very few exceptions, the only time I get a proper cuddle is if I am upset and needing comforted."

"People learn self loathing because they masturbate, or because they find that their boyfriend or their girlfriend masturbates. I am not aware of any point in Scripture where the practice of masturbation is unequivocally condemned; yet Christians speak as if they thought of it as 'dirty' or as unworthy. More than that, we are often heard to disapprove of material which is erotic, simply because it makes us feel uncomfortable, while the Biblical book Song of Songs contains much erotic material."

"By the Grace of God, I made it to my wedding day without experiencing intercourse. The same was true of my wife. . . . The biggest lesson I had to learn for myself was that, within marriage, sex is not merely condoned by God, but has His wholehearted approval."

"Inappropriate sexual behaviour often becomes stressful for relatives who are concerned for their own relative and feel the person expressing their sexuality should be lectured and stopped from any kind of sexual expression. Staff spend time explaining the rights of residents and our strategies for coping with this to relatives. This often helps to alleviate fears."

"Claims about fixed sexual orientation and identity need to avoid being facile and self-justifying. It is clearly possible to be trapped into a sexual self-perception and lifestyle which produce agony and despair. This question of fixed same-gender sexual orientation deserves to be treated with the greatest of caution."

"I regard my sexuality as intrinsic to my self-understanding and personality. It is a gift of God. It is what draws me into relationship with others. I believe, too, that I have the right to love and be loved in the most fulfilling way I know. I do not believe that God would wish to deprive of the joy and companionship that may come from a relationship founded on love and commitment."

"The Presbytery recognise that homosexual orientation is distinct from homosexual behaviour and affirm that a person wrestling with a homosexual orientation is not thereby disqualified from Christian discipleship but also affirm, within the context of Scripture's testimony, that all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God and are in need of repentance, forgiveness and renewal, that physical homosexual activity and practice and homosexual unions are contrary to God's plan for humankind and therefore sinful, and that continued and unrepentant involvement in such conduct is incompatible with faithful Christian discipleship."

"As a Kirk Session we affirm that all men and women are equally loved by God and made in His image, irrespective of sexual orientation, deplore all prejudice against and mistreatment of people on grounds of their sexual orientation and that the Church should welcome such people and respond to their pastoral needs with sensitivity and compassion."

"What the so-called incurable homosexual soul endures in unfulfilled longing is something which long experience of sharing with such souls has taught me to be nothing less than excruciating agony. And if there is one thing such souls need above all, it is the double advice, that affliction with an unnatural propensity, which can only come from Satan—by whatever means is beside the point—has to be accepted, and like Paul's thorn in the flesh has to be given over to God for Him to transform and subliminate into something beautiful and wonderfully useful to Him."

"Often I have the impression that being a homosexual has put me in the midst of a battlefield; the gay rights and the liberal church on the one side; the fundamentalist and the traditional church on the other. They seem to be more concerned about pushing each other and winning the debate than really trying to help and understand the homosexuals."

"Nonetheless, I am growing very aware of the current fashionable rush by some factions within the Church of Scotland to identify homosexual orientation and lifestyle as one viable and acceptable option among others. This has no Biblical basis. A desire to have sex with a member of one's own gender is perverse and we should be betraying true Christianity if—through a laudable desire to be loving and accepting—we were to ignore this crucial fact. Bigotry and queer-bashing are wrong; but this doesn't make affirmation of clear Christian sexuality less vital. Making this point, I would affirm that heterosexual lust and indulgence outwith marriage are equally wrong."

"If I had fully realised I was homosexual I would not have married and caused the hurt I did. I have difficulty with Scripture about sexuality now. When I came to faith I thought I could be celibate, but after a time I felt my God loves me and through me His love goes out too. He loves my friend and as we both love each other—surely it's not wrong. Then I read Romans 1:18 and 32 and am confused. Galatians 5:16 and 17 too. I know God loves me. I respond to that love but my sexuality gets in the way. I wish it was acceptable by the Church for caring homosexuals to have a blessing—God made our world and all in it. Am I damned for being a bastard and a lesbian?"

"Many of the problems homosexual people have are the same anyone over 35 who is still single has. The married with or without children do not always welcome or want to support other single people. They have each other and do not want to introduce a third party into the home who is a potential threat to the marital relationship. The married with children are often so busy with two careers, children, home, in-laws and other married friends that they do not have time for other single people. Single women have the other disadvantage that it is still a man's world. There are things a single man can do which is not open to a single woman in our society."

"Although aware of my strong homosexual orientation, I've continued to believe until I was 40 that marriage and a normal home life were possible and desirable for me. I must attribute this to social conditioning and religious upbringing, reinforced by loving and well-meaning parents, who saw marriage as the obvious way to the personal fulfilment and happiness they had found themselves. By the early 1970s, however, after several unsuccessful attempts at relationships with the opposite sex I realised that this belief was no longer tenable."

"Homosexuality is an essential part of my identity: to decry it or belittle it in any way is to attack my personal well-being. Put this way, the issue is one of human rights and certain inescapable conclusions must follow. It is not enough to abstain from condemnation; acceptance granting the same freedom of action to homosexuals as to heterosexuals is the only way forward. Equality and justice should be the watchwords of society and Church in this matter."

"God called me as a person to the ministry of the Church of Scotland. I called as a complete person, there is no doubt about that; but my sexuality is very much part of me. By logical deduction I must come to the conclusion that God has called a practising homosexual into the ministry. Do I assume therefore that the Church knows better than God who is acceptable in the ministry? I am sorry but I don't think so! I did not choose to be a homosexual, but I am, and I'm certainly not ashamed of that fact. Let me be honest in my ministry rather than the hypocrite that the Church forces me to be."

"About three years ago our son came home and told me that he was a homosexual. . . . He has had a very happy stable relationship for the past three years with a young man of whom we are very fond. . . . This (i.e., homosexuality) was not the boy's choice. . . . what intelligent young man with a career to make would handicap himself in this way from choice. . . . The reason for this letter is to make a plea for the Church to accept these young men so that they are not treated as outcasts but accepted as decent human beings."

7.5 HUMAN GENETICS AND EMBRYOLOGY

The Board, aware of current public interest and debate surrounding the many issues arising from human genetics, considers it important that the Board, and the Church, is able to respond appropriately. The Board has determined, therefore, to set up a Study Group to consider, from a Christian perspective, recent and potential developments in human genetics and embryology; to study and comment on the social, ethical, pastoral, and legal implications of such developments; to alert the Church to such issues; and to make recommendations. The Board will report to a future General Assembly.

8. THANKS TO STAFF

The Board comments the work of staff, in all fields of service, and at all levels, who consistently pursue their everyday tasks in a climate of change, embracing the demands of work which is continually developing and expanding. In responding to people in need, the Board gives thanks to God for the service of its supportive and caring staff.

9. EMPLOYMENT OF MINISTERS IN NON-PAROCIAL WORK

In accordance with the regulations adopted by the General Assembly in 1949, the Board intimates that no minister of the Church of Scotland is employed in its service

In the name of the Board,

WILLIAM F. WALLACE, *Convener.*
ANN ALLEN, *Vice-Convener.*
DONALD MOWAT, *Vice-Convener.*
IAN D. BAILLIE, *Director of Social Work.*